

HOW ALBERTA IS GOVERNED.

A reprint of an article by Mr. E.W. Thomson
in the Boston Transcript (1905-10?). n.p., n.d.

Rutherford

HOW ALBERTA **IS GOVERNED**



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

LIBRARY ARCHIVES

1905-10?

A STRIKING TRIBUTE TO
THE WORK OF THE
PROVINCIAL ADMINIS-
TRATION PAID BY MR.
E. W. THOMSON, IN THE
BOSTON TRANSCRIPT

MR. E. W. THOMSON

Mr. E. W. Thomson, the well-known correspondent of the Boston Transcript, recently contributed a letter to that paper, which is one of the oldest and most reputable in the United States, dealing with public affairs in the Province of Alberta. Few men the continent over have had so long and varied a literary and journalistic experience as Mr. Thomson. His early years he spent on the Canadian press, in the course of which he furnished a rare example of a newspaper man's devotion to principle. When occupying the position of chief editorial writer on the Toronto Globe, one of the great prizes in Canadian journalism, he found himself unable to agree with the Liberal party's policy and immediately resigned his post, contributing in no small degree to the success of the Conservatives at the succeeding elections. He has supported both Liberal and Conservative Governments since that time. There is nothing of the partizan about him but when a choice has to be made between two parties he believes that it is the duty of the journalist to state his preferences for one or the other. For the course which he adopts he is always able to offer the most cogent reasons and there is no Canadian whose views on public questions, are entitled to more careful consideration. Mr. Thomson, it should be mentioned, is a constant contributor to many of the foremost publications of the English-speaking world and his name is a familiar one to every close reader of the magazines and reviews. That the opinions of such a man on matters of intimate concern to Alberta are worthy of paying the closest heed to goes without saying.

File
Jen

A UTOPIAN STATE

A PROVINCE THAT IS ACTUALLY
GOVERNED BY ITS PEOPLE—THE
MONO-PARTY SYSTEM OF GOVERN-
MENT IN FORCE IN ALBERTA AND
IT WORKS ADMIRABLY—THE SIM-
PLICITY OF THE ADMINISTRATION
—THE SPLENDID MEN IN CONTROL

(Edward W. Thomson, in the Boston Transcript)

1909?

"The government of Alberta is about to begin a new railway policy which will directly affect the C. P. R., and which may have important results for the Hill system of American roads. Perhaps it is not necessary to tell Transcript readers that Alberta is the Canadian Province just eastward of British Columbia, on which it often abuts in the Rocky Mountains. It is rich in coal mines, cattle ranching grounds, gas fields, forests; it possesses what are declared to be the greatest petroleum areas in the world. But its lands are mostly agricultural. They include the vast unoccupied region called the Peace River country. That is in North Alberta. Many settlers are finding their way up there, since there the prairie trends quickly toward the Pacific Ocean, from which it is separated by a comparatively narrow chain of the Rockies. The Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern are both under construction to within what may be called sight of that enormous fertile area now largely retained by fur traders, by Indians and by half breeds, though it is thirty years since one of its districts, seven hundred miles north of Edmonton (which is nearly 400 miles north of lat. 49, or the U. S. boundary), showed the best wheat exhibited at a World's Fair.

2037821

To bring that almost virgin north under civilization is part of the task about to be undertaken by Alberta's very progressive government, and people—for the people there are peculiarly the government, as I design to explain soon. They intend at the coming session of the Provincial Legislature to formulate a financial plan by which branches of the Grand Trunk Pacific and one of the Canadian Northern will be aided to run northward from Edmonton to Peace River Crossing, and from Edmonton to Fort McMurray, on the Athabasca. These main branches will be each some four hundred miles long. Their northern terminals will be separated by some 350 miles, with Lesser Slave Lake lying between them. Short feeding-branches will necessarily be thrown out as the country receives settlers. Thus will not only an immense farming tract be opened up, but also petroleum fields, gas areas, coal beds—to say nothing of the fur-bearing regions that will be brought within easy reach.

IN SOUTHERN ALBERTA.

In Southern Alberta, mainly a prairie region of grazing and fall wheat farming, the C. P. R. has long held a monopoly of the railway traffic. It is an energetic public-spirited, well managed monopoly, but that does not imply that it builds all the branches that the people need, nor that they would not be the better of competition all along the line. It is not to be doubted that the people will gain profits as well as contentment, besides the pleasant sense of not being under dictation from any one set of railway magnates, by the new railway promotions which Alberta will undertake in the south. The Grand Trunk Pacific and the C. N. R. both design early extensions south-westward to Calgary, while the C. N. R. will push further south to Lethbridge, the bituminous coal mining centre, and to Macleod, the lively town of fall wheat and ranching regions. From these extensions, which will be each many hundred miles in length, branches will promptly be spread by the promotion policy soon to be detailed by Alberta's government. All these new roads will be within hailing distance of the Hill, or American main lines. It follows, as a matter of course, that the development of the Canadian country will bring in branches of the Hill system. Thus a keen competition cannot but be established where the best of all possible monopolies now holds almost undisputed sway.

ALBERTA'S FAVORABLE POSITION.

Alberta is in a position to push this active railway policy because the Province has handsome revenues, does not owe one cent, and will be enabled to spend a lot more money through creating new sources of provincial revenue by internal development. The new branch lines, in so far as aided provincially, will be essentially

provincial assets or investments, yielding revenues indirectly, but none the less surely to the Edmonton treasury.

How is it that a Province which began political existence less than 40 months ago, almost without roads, bridges, ferries, telephones, and other large conveniences, now has all these good things in uncommon abundance, yet owes nothing, and is able to start out on a magnificent yet very sane railway scheme? The answer cannot but be of large interest to all students of politics. They have talked and have been told over and over again, ad nauseam, of the advantages that could not but accrue from uni-party or no-party government. Well, that is what the sensible people of Alberta started in September, 1905, when they began political existence practically unbedeviled by an organized rigid, party system.

NO PARTY SYSTEM.

The people had not then been really divided into two hostile and mutually cursing camps. Efforts to so divide them failed in the specified year. They had come, mostly people of the great races (American, Canadian, British, Irish, Scandinavian, German, French, Swedish, Norwegian, Icelandic), from all their various native regions quite recently. They were required to choose men to manage the public affairs suddenly given over to their control by the Ottawa Government. They took the common sense course of choosing the best men in sight. It happened that these men were called Liberals, and the Liberal party is therefore entitled to claim credit for the good results. But, in fact, the people set up uni-party or no-party government. That is what it amounts to.

The good men who called themselves Liberals—and all Canadians, except a few stick-in-the-muds, are Liberals in the right meaning of the term—were elected in the proportion of 24 to 1. They were put in sole control, and therefore put absolutely on honor. This came about partly because the so-called Conservatives (who attempted in 1905 to introduce the largely damnable two-party system where there was no sort of real need for it), were obviously 'machine' men, and as obviously inspired and directed by the C. P. R. interest, which the people jealously regarded as dangerous to their interest. The local C. P. R. solicitor was leader and chief bow-wow of the so-called Conservatives. But, no matter how the utter defeat of him and his "tail" came about, the result was to establish uni-party government, which is just about the same thing in a new region as no-party government would be. Complete power was given to ministers obviously devoted to the Provincial interest alone.

THE ALBERTA MINISTERS.

It should be noted that these ministers were obviously good men. If the people had not chosen such, the fine experiment must have

failed, and worse. There is no use expecting figs from "thorn" bushes, nor honorable administration from scalliwags. The ministers were but four, all conspicuously well known for straight private and business lives, all fairly wealthy, and all of that fraternal disposition which is so curiously notable all over "the Province of the glad hand." They were not one bit demagoguish, and yet they were comrade-like, with all decent folk. Church-going men, teetotallers. And, what is remarkable, and may be instructive, not one eloquent man in the lot. Quiet men. The blather-skite is one of the curses of politics everywhere else. His performances cause multitudes of people to mistake gab for reasoning, and the gift of it for fitness to do public business. The Alberta ministers were all very capable of slowly explaining what they thought the right thing to do, and they were duly convincing and persuasive. Hearing them in 1905, and their principal opponent, a man of platform fireworks, I concluded that he was beaten every time, just because the audiences discounted his rhodomontades, and believed every word the slow, conscientious-talking fellows uttered. They proved to be as quick in action as they were steady, if rather awkward on the stump.

The absence of partisan opposition in the assembly had various excellent effects. First, there was no waste of time in vituperation, accusation, suspicion, slander, and all the malign bosh that comes from both sides in regular, party-divided legislatures. Thus the people were not drawn into a long succession of imitative recriminations. Hence they kept on friendly terms with one another, and Alberta is conspicuously alone in this agreeable condition. Every visitor notes it.

COST OF DEBATE.

Again, a great deal of public money was saved by the shortness of debate in the assembly. Electors seldom reflect on how expensive is blather-skiting. At Ottawa it costs \$28 a minute counting all the expenses dubbed "for legislation," and all the services, clerical returns, paper, printing, etc., etc., that have to be paid for in proportion as Parliament sits long, and gives its time mostly to angry, futile contentions, the Opposition fishing for "scandals," and the ministry leading them on into carefully planned pitfalls, all to make election capital. Moreover, the horrid practice of blather-skiting uses up ministers, takes the time they ought to be giving to public business, worries and wearies them, puts some of them out of the right temper for dealing carefully, and causes many things to be "rushed" instead of long meditated. From all these evils the Alberta people set themselves free by their uni-party system. They saved, for expenditure on public works, and on the promotion of agriculture, a great deal of money. It cannot be too much insisted on that the system leaves good men free to do good work.

WORK OF HON. MR. CROSS.

The work was well done all round. The one lawyer of the Ministry, Mr. C. W. Cross, a man in his early thirties, soon showed that the government did not mean to palter with "interests" which conceived themselves powerful to affect votes. He solved the long-neglected problem of compelling the C. P. R. Co. to pay taxes. He smashed a strong "lumber combine," thus freeing the prairie settlers from the heavy incubus of high prices for monopolized house-building material. He enforced law and order over the vast tract so perfectly that Alberta is a model Province in that most important respect. He abolished saloons, and reduced the number of urban and rural licenses so greatly that temptation to drink is very little before the young or old. He took up the Dominion Government's "Sunday Act," and made it just as perfectly binding on railways as on grog-dealing drug stores and laundrymen. The "bad man" was everywhere defied, jumped on, scrunched, hammered, run out. A huge region of frontier is there as peaceful as Commonwealth Avenue.

With much ingenuity a smart tax on the unoccupied lands of speculators was so levied that it applies provincially only outside of school districts, while any such land in the school districts has to pay to the school. A novel law compels in Alberta the registration of agreements for land sales, thus stopping some rogues in the practice of selling the same tract more than once, giving several deeds, and then skipping with the proceeds. Excellent Mechanics' Lien and Compensation for Injuries Acts were established, so that the unpaid or the injured can, and do get, speedy remedy. New district courts and connected officials bring justice actively to every part. Industrial schools for the juvenile misled or criminal were set up promptly, public charities created, though there is small need for them, and every appropriate item of advanced civilization brought into effective action.

TAXES ON C. P. R. LANDS.

Finally the young Attorney-General has taken up the very important business of compelling the C. P. R. to pay taxes on its wild lands. Twenty-five million acres were granted to that company by way of subsidy, about 1880. These lands were not to be taxed locally during twenty years from grant. When the local authorities of the prairies tried to tax the C.P.R. holdings the company pleaded that such collection was barred until 20 years after each separate section or tract had been patented to them by the Crown. This contention was held good by the judicial committee of the British Privy Council, Canada's final court of appeal. Mr. Cross has since gone into the whole question. He believes that the case vs. the C. P. R. was not duly presented. He has a lot of new points, and will bring them

before the courts. Hence the importance to Alberta of retaining the services of him and his colleagues.

THE WORK OF EDUCATION.

To enumerate the proceedings of the uni-party ministry of Alberta could not but worry Transcript readers. Enough to observe that 1300 schools and a Provincial University have been set going; that every region has been provided with roads, bridges, ferries and, rather wonderful, to relate, a rapidly extending and most efficient, cheap government telephone service, which pays, and is a first rate as well as a most popular investment. In this matter Alberta led in a course that is being followed by all the West-Canada Provinces. They buy out the Bell Telephone concern and then proceed, much to the sellers' amazement, to improve the system, and yet make it profitable. So much for the much ridiculed idea that some important public facilities can best be supplied by the public.

As Alberta's main industry is farming, its promotion came in for much ministerial attention. Creameries were not merely promoted, but run by the Government. Poultry, grain, breeding animals, herds, methods of farming, all were liberally looked to. An Alberta farmer can insure his crops against hail more cheaply with the government than with private insurance concerns. It is simply amazing to observe how the "ploughmen, choppers and fishers" who "constitute the State"—to use Emerson's words—are up-to-date in the methods of sane collectivism.

Finally, money for all these sound proceedings was sufficiently found without taxing private Albertans one cent provincially. For schools and purely local improvements they tax themselves a good deal, municipally, but they get Provincial "grants in aid." Railways, licenses, corporations dealing in public facilities, etc., supply the \$600,000 of Provincial taxation, and the rest of the Alberta revenue comes from Dominion subsidies, on the peculiar Canadian system. What is especially remarkable in Alberta, where the Premier, Mr. Rutherford, is treasurer as well as Minister of Education, is that minute inquiry from many persons last October, when I was there, failed to find one allegation that the public money was not honestly and mostly thriftily expended. Such is an effect of choosing good men, and putting them on their honor. This is the uni-party system, and mighty good business. It has so established the credit of Alberta that, if she should desire to borrow for, or guarantee aid to her newly projected branch railways, she could certainly get money loaned at the lowest ruling rate."

